

U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs



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VISION QUEST INDIAN COUNTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Kevin Gover, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs

I have seen many things during this past year. I have seen pride and hope in the faces of our children and determination in the eyes of tribal leaders as they deal with problems that seem insurmountable. I have seen perseverance and accomplishment in the eyes of teachers, police, and social workers. And I have seen into the eyes of our adversaries.

Through all the trips, all the meetings, and all of the briefings that come with this job, throughout all of these things, I see more clearly the vision for our people that we all share as we approach the 21st century.

Seven generations ago, our warriors laid down their arms. With their way of life under attack and their very existence at peril from the advancing westward march of America, these great patriots capitulated to the United States and went to the reservations. They surrendered so that our people could survive. They knew there would be hardship and pain. But they did what they had to do to preserve our people.

Though most people in the United States believed that American Indians would assimilate or die on the reservations, we have survived as a distinct people with pride in our culture. We are two million strong with the youngest and fastest growing population of any ethnic group in the United States. So we owe these warriors a debt of gratitude. They knew the mark of a warrior was dedication to a cause greater than oneself and they lived out this creed.



A party of Ogalala Sioux, dressed in their characteristic traditional clothing with feather war bonnets and beadwork sashes, gathers on a hill overlooking the Valley of Wounded Knee Creek on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Photo by Edward Curtis, circa 1900.

Assistant Secretary Kevin Gover, 43, is a member of the Pawnee Tribe and was raised in Lawton and Norman, Oklahoma. He graduated from Princeton University in 1978 and the University of New Mexico Law School; clerked for a federal judge in Albuquerque; worked for the Washington law firm of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Kampelman; and then opened a law practice in Albuquerque. He worked in the Native Vote Movement in New Mexico in the 1980s and organized Native Americans for Clinton/Gore in 1992.

Now, seven generations later, the time has come to rediscover and reinvigorate the warrior spirit in each of us. I am proud to say that I have met many of the warriors of today. I have talked with hundreds of men and women dedicated to their people, their tribes, and their children. Our warriors come in many forms: teachers, tribal leaders, doctors, lawyers, artists, and journalists. All of their efforts are noteworthy and in the tradition of the great patriot warriors of the past.

Yet, as of now, we are falling short in preparing our Seventh Generation to become the leaders and the warriors of our people into the 21st century and beyond. We are failing this generation and we are failing ourselves. I do not need to tell all of you that the scourges of alcoholism, drug abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence are devastating our people. If we do not defeat these terrible plagues, they will become the four horsemen of our apocalypse as a people.

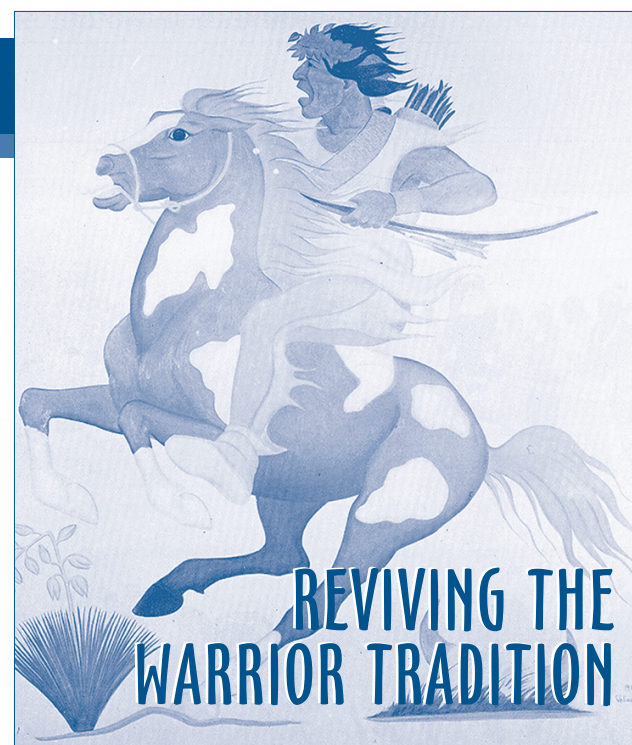
I can personally attest to the problems created by drug and alcohol abuse. These problems affect entire communities and our young people absorb most of the pain. They pay a terrible price for

our shortcomings. This is the single most important issue facing us today. Wounded children grow into wounded adults and nothing we do in the areas of sovereignty, land rights, or any other issue will matter much, if another generation continues to suffer and die.

Marking a Path to the Future

This is precisely why we must rely on our warrior tradition. Our cultures are vibrant and lively and remain our greatest strength. We are seeing the power of our cultures in many ways across Indian Country. We saw the Plains tribes rise up and demand the Yellowstone bison herd not face slaughter at the hands of the Montana cattle industry. We are seeing the Makah Tribe reinstate their traditional whale hunt in the Pacific. We are seeing tribes across the country use 21st-Century computer technology to teach their history, their culture, and their traditions to their children and to the world. The Mashantucket Pequot museum is a magnificent example of the power of a people telling its own story, rather than letting others tell it for them.

But we still face deeply ominous threats to our culture. In the 19th century, our opponents realized that if they destroyed the buffalo, they destroyed the power of the Plains tribes. Today, we are seeing the same strategy play out in the Northwest and in Alaska. The enemies of Indian people are attacking the tribes by attacking subsistence hunting and fishing. Our enemies believe that if they can destroy the subsistence



animals, they can destroy the tribes. And they are being dreadfully effective. They have pushed the sacred salmon onto the endangered species list. They refuse to afford Alaska Natives their federally guaranteed right to subsistence hunting.

All of the tribes have a stake in these battles. If we do not overcome our enemies, we will watch a repeat of the systematic slaughter of the animals that form the centerpiece of the culture and way of life of these tribes. I ask that each tribe take up the cause of Alaska Native subsistence. We must make this a national issue to which all tribes are committed if we are to continue the resurgence of traditional tribal values.

Now is the time for our new warriors to prepare this precious generation so they can teach the next seven. Now is the time for all of us to be warriors. We face many obstacles to making this a reality. And the hardest part of this job is seeing so much that needs to be done and knowing there simply are not enough resources to do it all. And if we rely on the Federal Government, there will never be enough time, manpower, or money to make all the things happen that need to happen in Indian Country. We need to reach out and find answers. We need jobs. We need physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy citizens. We need communities where the whole village raises each and every child.



A Nez Perce Brave wearing a classic war bonnet with lavish feather work and matching eagle feathers is depicted in a photograph by Edward Curtis, the last of the great 19th Century photographers of the American West.

COMBATING THE SCOURGE OF ALCOHOL & DRUGS

Another important change in the Bureau of Indian Affairs has been re-establishing the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention to find a way to combat these scourges. The office has been reinstituted in the bureau under the guidance of a task force of tribal leaders, many of whom first volunteered last year. This group is working with everyone they can find to come up with ways to combat dependency on alcohol and drugs, especially with our children. **Ken Paquin** is my point man on this issue. If you are not involved in this process yet, I encourage you and your tribe to join in this discussion.

The office is now working to find a way to get resources out to the reservations. But the problems created through alcohol and drug dependence can not be solved with edicts from the 4th floor of the Main Interior Building in Washington, DC. This problem can only be solved by American Indian communities—families, teachers, students, members, and tribes. The solution will come from your people, your warriors, with a strong spirit and the understanding that we do not have a single person to waste. This is the most important thing all of us can do.

The office will help tribes set up their own programs and then work with them to stop the problem of alcohol and drug abuse on our reservations, especially among our children. Already, we are seeing some strong steps being taken toward this end. On the Oglala Lakota Tribe's reservation in South Dakota, citizens' patrols have been established to help deal with the challenge. This was a role the tribe's warriors played in the past and that role has now been assumed by women in the tribe. Congratulations and thanks to those Lakota women warriors. You are doing important work on those patrols, and this demonstrates what can happen when we begin to take steps to solve problems.

At the Pueblo of Laguna, the tribe has tapped a variety of federal agencies and mounted a comprehensive community-based attack on alcoholism, domestic violence, and youth crime. I salute the Laguna warriors who conduct nightly patrols in their villages. Every problem has a solution, even complex and painful problems like the abuse of alcohol and drugs. Try something, and if it doesn't work, try something else, but do not allow the enormity of the problem to stop all progress.

I see an Indian America strong in spirit, strong in economy, and strong in each and every one of our governments, where we all stand tall and our children are proud to declare that they are the descendants of a powerful and spiritual people, unified in a common experience of being Indian. I see a life where America and ourselves look with pride at our people knowing we have overcome every obstacle imaginable not only to survive but also to prosper. We have much to share with America and the world. Our culture, our traditions, and our sense of being a part of the natural world instead of controlling it are lessons the rest of this country and the world must learn. We can share this knowledge, but first our communities need to recover from the holocaust we experienced in the 19th Century.

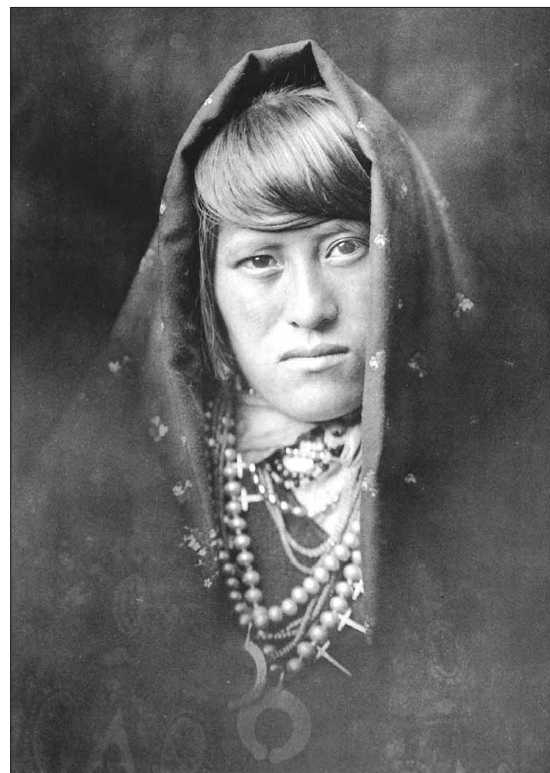
There is no way to achieve this vision for our future without making some changes. Just as the warriors who ensured our survival suffered their own hardships when the reservation era began, there are changes we need to make and hardships of leadership we need to experience. These changes may not be popular and they may be difficult but they are necessary. We must ask ourselves what changes need to be made right now, in order for the generations that follow us to live in prosperity instead of poverty, to live in health instead of sickness, and to live in safety instead of fear.

Changing the Bureau of Indian Affairs

Obviously changes are needed in the 175-year-old Bureau of Indian Affairs. Working with central office managers and the area directors, I have already begun changing the way the bureau operates. And there will be many more. After a great deal of discussion, a vision of how the bureau should operate in the future began to emerge.

The BIA is not now, nor has it ever been, a model of efficiency. But it is getting better. Currently, the bureau delivers more than 90 percent of its \$1.7 billion annual budget resources directly to tribal communities in 638 contracts, self-governance compacts, or direct services. Our 12,000 bureau employees are doing a good job and should be proud of this accomplishment. But we are going to get better. Already, several work groups have been formed to look into ways to improve bureau services and I'm confident that we will get the job done. The stronger the bureau, the better we can serve the tribes.

Within the next 10 or 15 years, the BIA will, for the most part, be out of the business of directly providing services to tribal communities. Virtually all services provided to reservation residents will be handled by the tribes themselves with funds appropriated through the bureau. Five things must be done to prepare the BIA for the 21st century.



An Acoma Woman depicts a Pueblo Indian wearing a traditional cloth shawl and silver and turquoise jewelry. The Pueblo Indians learned the art of making silver jewelry from the Navajo.

First, we must persuade the Congress to fully fund tribal program needs. A shortage of money is the primary obstacle to allowing all the tribes to handle their contracts and compacts for education, health, public safety, and other service programs. For self-determination and self-governance policies to fully succeed, the United States Government must provide the resources to actually solve problems, instead of just maintaining the status quo. That was my purpose in agreeing to the compromise on Section 129 and forming the Tribal Priority Allocations Workgroup. The group, which includes BIA officials and tribal leaders, will study changes in federal funding formulas that take into account the economic self-sufficiency of casino-rich tribes and will make recommendations.

Second, the bureau must be redesigned to efficiently and effectively carry out its responsibility to protect and

enhance tribal trust resources. That is why we are implementing the Secretary's Trust Management Improvement Project. This project, agreed upon by the Secretary, the Special Trustee, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, will overhaul all key aspects of our trust management system. The result will be a state-of-the-art computerized information system that will allow tribes and the Department to effectively manage Indian trust resources. There is much work to be done. To succeed, we must pass legislation authorizing settlement of tribal claims for the mismanagement of their trust funds and legislation to address the crisis of fractionated interests. We will work closely with all interested tribes on this legislation.

Third, the bureau must be accountable to Congress, the Department, and the tribes for its management and administration of federal funds. For far too long, the bureau has lagged behind other federal agencies in carrying out its responsibilities as an agency of the United States. The result is that our adversaries in Congress have used the BIA's shortcomings as an excuse for the refusal to appropriate needed dollars for tribal programs.

That is why I have initiated a systematic management review of all bureau operations. When this process is completed, we will bring to the tribes our proposal for reorganizing management and administration. Let me make clear we are not talking about restructuring service programs, only the BIA's administration of its internal affairs in matters of accounting, property management, records management, personnel, and the like. If we succeed in improving the bureau's internal administration, we will be better able to request, and more credible in requesting, additional funds for tribal programs.

On a related issue, we must also be able to say that tribal contractors are using federal funds in an efficient and lawful way. This means we will insist that tribes meet the fundamental obligations of users of federal funds in such areas as compliance with single audit requirements, use of federal excess property to carry out federal contract programs, and the investment of advance funds. Fairly or not, when one tribe fails to meet its obligations in this regard, that fact is used against all tribes to deny them additional funds for their service programs.

Fourth, BIA must assume a stronger role in coordinating federal executive branch policy towards the tribes. While the Clinton Administration has opened up all departments of the government to tribal leaders, we can improve greatly in making sure that federal agencies acknowledge their trust responsibility to tribal governments. That is why the Secretary and the White House have established the Domestic Policy Council Working Group on American Indians and Alaska Natives. We must institutionalize and upgrade the commitment of other departments to this working group, so that whoever the next President may be, this group continues to exist.

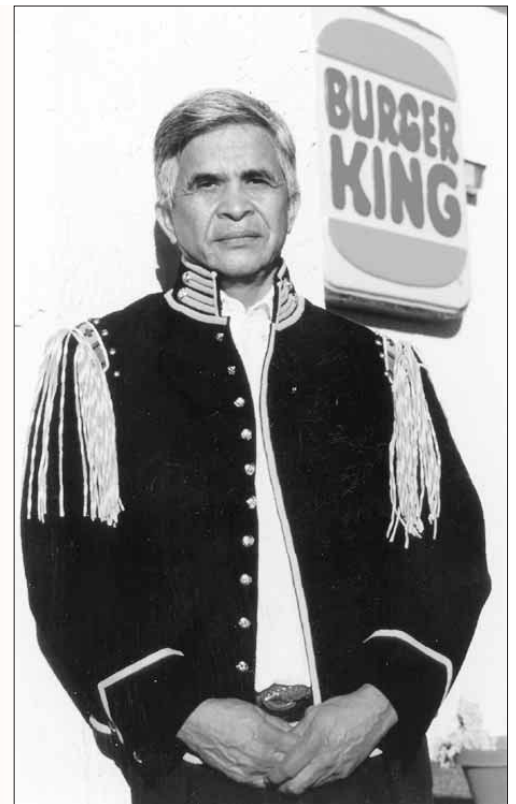
Fifth, the bureau must redefine its service mission. As I have said, the tribes will be responsible for virtually all service programs for reservation residents. The role that is left for the BIA to play is technical support to tribal contractors. For example, not every tribe needs or can afford full-time hydrologists, engineers, archeologists, and other scientists to support their programs. The bureau can and should take the responsibility for making such scientific expertise available to the tribes. None of these ideas are mine alone. In fact, most of them can be found in the work of the joint Department of the Interior-Tribal Reorganization Task Force. It is time to implement the recommendations contained in the task force's report.



Above, the self-help team that worked on a buffer fence of natural stone at the Crow Agency in Montana includes, from left, Gary Daves, of the Crow Tribal Staff; Leroy Cummins, BIA Facilities; Ralph Chavez, Crow Tribal Staff; and Chris Dillon, BIA Facilities. Below right, is Robert Other Medicine, whose masonry and construction skills have enabled the team to save thousands of dollars on projects.



Richard P. Mike, a Navajo businessman who owns a string of Burger King franchises that he acquired with help from a Bureau of Indian Affairs loan guarantee, believes more Indians should embrace private enterprise. The highly successful businessman and his partner **Nina Heflin** own four Burger King franchises located in Kayenta, Page, and Chinle, Arizona, and Shiprock, New Mexico. A full-blood Navajo from the Monument Valley (Utah) portion of the reservation, Mike began his Burger King career with a \$500,000 loan guarantee from the BIA. He made the final payment on the loan last October. The loan enabled Mike to overcome the major difficulty many Indian entrepreneurs face in building a business—finding the start-up capital. Land held in trust for Indian tribes and individuals is difficult, if not impossible, to mortgage for capital.



Stimulating Economic Development

Another initiative I am very pleased with is the change we have made in our economic development program. On Indian lands across the country, there are rampant social problems directly related to the lack of opportunity. Currently 49 percent of the American Indian workforce—nearly one-half of those available—is without jobs. Programs for home loans and the Welfare to Work initiative are stalled before they start.

But when business and economic development come to a reservation, an amazing thing happens. The social problems we have been struggling with begin to get smaller as the employment rate and opportunities for Indians get greater. The tribes themselves will lead the way in the effort to bring business and opportunity to Indian Country, but the BIA also has an important role to play.

Our Guaranteed Loan Program can assist in providing capital for businesses that otherwise may go unfunded. Our technical resources will be channeled into the most cost-effective projects, and our people have been instructed to work with tribal leadership to identify and eliminate internal barriers to sound business practices.

Very often, when tribes try to improve the lives of their people, they are met with opposition from every possible source. We are now tearing down the barriers at the bureau and moving quickly on economic development projects. The BIA has created a credit committee that meets monthly and considers every completed application within 30 days. The economic development office also has developed a CD-ROM training program and Internet tools that can help prospective guarantee applicants to better understand the requirements for participating in the program and help them to prepare the application.

We are also moving forward with the 477 program to help develop a well-trained workforce. The 477 program is a federal initiative that allows tribes to receive lump-sum funding for training and employment programs from three different agencies and 12 different programs. This program has substantially reduced reporting requirements and administrative procedures, allowing tribes to shift administrative costs into actual program dollars. We are committed to at least 44 new grantees in the next five years so that employment and training opportunities can be expanded. This expansion can result in 5,000 new job opportunities for Indians.

Indian Country revitalization must accelerate as we move toward the new century and we must aspire to reinvigorate the warrior tradition among our people and in our own lives. We must bring back the spirit of dedication to a cause greater than oneself. We need clear-eyed warriors, men and women, young and old, artists and lawyers, construction workers and teachers, writers and musicians working together for a better life for our people.

The Seventh Generation for which our patriot warriors fought and died walks among us now. Let this generation of young people be the one that frees us from the nightmare of alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and suicide. Let this be the generation that breaks our century-old cycle of poverty, disease, and despair.

This article was adapted from an address that Assistant Secretary Kevin Gover delivered to the 55th Annual National Congress of American Indians on Oct. 20, 1998. More on Native American history and current affairs, pages 17, 28, 36, and 39.